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SUBJECT: PAIGC SET TO PREVAIL IN PEACEFUL AND ORDERLY GUINEA BISSAU ELECTION

¶1. On November 14, 2008, POLCOUNS and two PolOffs traveled to Guinea Bissau to observe the nation's first legislative election since 2004. As observed by EmbOffs, the November 16 poll was calm and relatively well-organized and executed. An estimated 72 percent of registered voters turned out for the election that will establish a new mandate for the National Assembly, dissolved in August, 2008. Following weeks of exuberant campaigning, Election Day was marked by peaceful enthusiasm and was void of the violence that has marred other national elections since 2000.

¶2. EmbOffs observed the elections in the capital city of Bissau, and the regional towns of Bafata, Gabu, and Buba. EmbOffs observed several minor irregularities with the poll. For example, supplies were lacking at certain polling stations, the ballot boxes were not secured in strict accordance with National Electoral Commission (CNE) guidelines, and the transportation and hand-over of the counted ballots to district election officials was lacking in standardization. Nevertheless, these technical issues appeared to have no impact on the election results. Thanks in part to a constant atmosphere of transparency, local election officials and political party observers uniformly expressed to EmbOffs satisfaction with the poll.

¶3. Over 150 international observers from the European Union (EU), Japan, the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS), the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP), and the United Nations (UN), as well as Canada, Japan, and the United Kingdom all expressed satisfaction, either informally or formally, with the organization and execution of the election. UN Special Envoy to Guinea-Bissau Shola Omorogie called the election a "victory for democracy" and the head of the EU long-term election observation mission, Jahan van Hecke, declared himself "satisfied" with the election process.

¶4. Based on unofficial initial returns, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) appears headed towards a landslide victory. In the voting precincts monitored by EmbOffs, PAIGC won between 53 and 63 percent of the votes. Preliminary returns suggest that the PAIGC could claim up to 17 of the 20 parliamentary seats in Bissau, and perhaps as many as 65 of the 100 seats in the National Assembly. The Party for Social Renewal (PRS) appears headed for a distant second place finish. Official results are scheduled to be released on November 21.

Bernicat